



Hobo Code



BO TALES



VOL. 2 NO. 1 APRIL 1992



ORIGINAL HOBO NICKEL SOCIETY, INC.

Post Office Box 37
Boonsboro, Maryland 21713



A Visit with Newell "Mess Cook" Shireman

by Gall "Bo-Ette" Kraljevich

The first time that most of us ever heard of a Hobo Nickel was after the publication of Delma Romine's excellent book on the subject in 1982; but not so with member #52 — Newell "Mess Cook" Shireman of Middletown, Pennsylvania. I was fortunate to be able to interview Newell at a recent convention. The following is a portion of the delightful conversation that I shared with this most interesting gentleman.

Newell was just out of high school in June, 1933 when he, clad in his beloved football sweater with a big letter "M" on the front, took to the rails in search of adventure and to see the country. The only money that he had was a fifty dollar bill hidden in the heel of his shoe — for an emergency. He jumped a train heading west, and in Joliet, Illinois, close to the prison, he found a hobo camp where he hoped to spend the night. That's where he met "Bert." Bertrand "Bert" Wiegand is one of the *known* carvers of hobo nickels, and is profiled in Del's book.

Newell and Bert traveled together for about 2 months, heading first to the west coast by freight train, then south, east and north stopping in such places as Kansas City (by the stock yards), Oklahoma City, and Buffalo. During their time together, Bert taught Newell about Hobo life, how to fend for himself, the importance of sharing with everyone in the group, and to never take something without giving something in return.

Newell was fascinated by something that Bert did — something that he had never seen before — he hand carved buffalo nickels, turning the Indian into like-



Don Haley (left) beams with satisfaction while discussing with Ed Filipkowski (center) and Dallas Shaw (right) his winning strategy that got him two hobos (a Bert and a Bo) at the Bowers and Merens Auction during the FUN show.

nesses of people that he met, or of himself. (He never knew Bert to carve the reverse or buffalo side of the coin.) Bert, a well-educated man and the son of an engraver, used tools that were hand made, with wooden handles. He used a kind of vice to hold the nickel as he carved — similar to something one uses to tie fishing flies. He carried these in a canvas bag that went over his shoulder, much like a boy scout backpack you might see today. One of his nickels would take hours to finish, and according to Newell, Bert could produce approximately 15 to 20 a week. Bert traded these nickels for food, or gave them to people that treated him good.

When I asked Newell if Bert had ever given him any of his nickels, he said that he had — maybe five, but over

(continued on page 7)

"The Pres Says"

Worthwhile Investments

by Dallas Shaw
President

"Colonel"

It was great seeing and meeting with old and new friends at the FUN Convention in Orlando. A good time was had by all and I hope that all of you will join us in July at the ANA Summer Conference.

Speaking of FUN, the Society set up a table with exhibits of original and modern hand carved nickels, highlighted with examples of the works of George Washington Hughes (Bo) and Bertrand Wiegand (Bert). An exhibit of hobo literature was also featured. We were fortunate to have many visitors to the table. A lot of newsletters and membership applications were handed out. Our Society meeting was well attended and featured in *Numismatic News*.

In my last column, I outlined the need for membership growth and public education. Hopefully, all of us will reach a personal goal of recruiting at least one new member. For those of us already members, and new members as well, the Society offers a life membership program that is worthy of your consideration. It provides benefits both to the member and to the society.

One of the original goals of the Society was to sponsor a YN to the ANA Summer Conference. I am happy to report that we will meet that goal in our very first year. A selection process is currently underway to select this year's recipient. The scholarship will be a significant expense for the Society. You can help with donations to the scholarship fund in care of our treasurer, Bo-ette. I can't think of a more worthwhile investment in the future of our hobby and Society than this one.

Another goal of the Society was the establishment of an authentication program. This would allow you the opportunity to have your original hobo nickels authenticated as such. In order to insure that we did it right and, in fact, that it is doable, a committee has been appointed to evaluate the feasibility of an authentication program. The committee consists of Chuck "Budha" Irwin, Don "Bert" Farnsworth and Don "H20" Haley. Be sure and provide them your thoughts on the subject. They would appreciate hearing from you.

Let me close by saying thank you for your support of the Society. We can't get it done without your personal support. See you in Colorado. ★

Hobo Nickel Books!

We have acquired a few copies of Delma K. Romines book *Hobo Nickels*. This extensive study of *Hobo Nickels*, *Prisoner Nickels*, *Shop Tokens* and *Modern Engravings* has been out of print for some time, and is quite hard to find. If anyone is interested in a copy, we are selling them for \$25.00 each. Hold on! . . . I know the cover price is \$8.95, but the entire profit will go into our **Young Numismatist Scholarship Fund**.

Please send a check for \$25.00 to:

"Original Hobo Nickel Society"

Att: "Bo-ette"

P.O. Box 43

Malvern, PA 19355



Excerpted from *Brunswick: 100 Years of Memories*, by the Brunswick History Commission, Brunswick, Maryland, 1990, p. 71.

During the decade of the thirties and the Great Depression, the tow path along the C&O Canal at Brunswick was referred to as "hobo jungle" with "professional" hobos. When freight trains stopped here, more men arrived while some ended their stay and took off for what they hoped would be greener pastures.

Apparently the B&O Railroad and all the rest of the rail lines did not pull all the stops to keep the men off the trains. They realized what these men were up against, and conditions were the same throughout the country.

When a housewife responded to a hungry hobo's request by giving him a sandwich or a platter of food, that house was marked. The word spread and other visitors appeared. Grateful people willingly shared with those less fortunate. Some families seated them at their own tables. Often the travelers asked for work to do in payment for the handout; outside work was frequently available.

Dutch Burns was old enough by then to wander down to the "jungle" and make his own observations. These men shared, he reports. If a piece of meat on bread was offered, often the men would eat the bread and take the meat back to their camp, where the collection of meat and other available ingredients became mulligan stew for the entire group.

Young girls were admonished by their mothers not to go to the tow path.

"Ponderin's on Hobo 5¢"

by "Zemo" Fivaz

When "Critter" Ware asked me to pen an article for this issue of *BO TALES*, I had a difficult time coming up with a single subject about which to write.

I decided to present a potpourri of topics which I hope are of interest to you. They range from what to look for to make your chances better of finding an original Hobo 5¢, to what *you* can do to promote the club and at the same time possibly uncover some original pieces, to a proposed "grading" system for this interesting area of collecting.

First, what should you look for to increase your chances of purchasing an original (old) Hobo Nickel? While there are no hard and fast rules, here are some suggestions:

1. Pay particular attention to the **overall appearance** of the piece. Does it *look* old and as though it was done many years ago, with dirt and "crud" filling the carved or punched areas, or is the "carving" nice and shiny, offering the impression that it was probably done last year . . . or *last week*?
2. Is the work delicate, fine-line and/or detailed, or is it "heavily" done, with deep lines and very bold detail? Many early original pieces are crudely done, but over the years the edges of the carved or punched areas have "mellowed," for want of a better word, sort of rounding off the edges so they're not sharp and rough. Examining a good many confirmed original pieces whenever you get the opportunity will be your greatest asset in this particular area.
3. Many of the original Hobo Nickels were done on higher grade (VF-UNC) coins, and a good percentage were also presented on 1913 (T-1) pieces. However, just because you find a suspected original Hobo 5¢ done on one of these (high grade and/or a '13 T-1), it doesn't guarantee that it is an original. It does offer a better than even chance though, as most contemporary "artists" hesitate to use these for their work today, as they also do early mintmarked or scarcer date coins.
4. Look for initials on the coin. Those with "J.D." and "J. ALLEN" punched or carved on them are of recent vintage, and in most cases not made prior to 1960. Also, any that are enameled with bright colors are very likely "new" pieces.
5. Examine the workmanship closely — was it done by hand in your opinion, or was a power tool (drill, etc.) employed to create the design? A power implement

often leaves what I refer to as a "stutter" design which is characterized by the tip of the drill jumping slightly from one area to the other, leaving small but detectable "ridges" in the depressions. The power drill, the type used by dentists, is a popular instrument used by today's creators.

6. Finally, nowadays it is unusual to find more than one or two original Hobo Nickels together at one time in a dealer's offering. If the seller has a substantial selection of pieces from which to choose, chances are very good that they are recent works. It would also be a good idea to use Del Romines' book on the subject as a reference, as a great many of those being made since Del's book came out in June of 1982 are copies of those shown in the book. A side-by-side comparison of the coin to the book photo will show a clear difference in technique.

Second, "spread the word" about Hobo Nickels and the club — it *may* just reap you some handsome rewards. Let me explain . . .

It's long been my contention that possibly 90% of all existing original Hobo 5¢ are *not* in collections, but squirreled away in jewel or cigar boxes, in desk drawers or in coin "accumulations" of non-collectors throughout the country. These folks have no idea whatsoever as to what they are, the history behind them, or their value. They are simply "something Grampa Ned or Uncle Charlie had."

Because the vast majority of these very-collectible-but-tough-to-find pieces are essentially "out of the market," the question arises, how do we liberate them from their hiding places?

The most obvious way is to **get the word out, through the non-numismatic media** (what good would it do to try to reach these non-collectors through the coin press?), to let the owners know that they have a collectible item. How do we (you) do this?

Consider, if you will, an article in your local newspaper **with a photo of a Hobo 5¢** (this is absolutely *essential!*), telling the readers just what they are, the story behind them, and information about the club. You may even want to include your name and phone number as a contact *if* you feel so inclined and *if* the newspaper allows it.

It is my hope that the club would supply you with a proposed article *and* a photo for you to submit to your paper for consideration. If any of you are interested in trying this approach with your local paper, service club

magazine or bulletin (such as Rotary, Kiwanis, etc.), or even your local retirement home periodicals, please let the club secretary ("Critter" Ware, P.O. Box 37, Boonsboro, MD 21713-0037) know, and if there's enough interest, I'll write the suggested article and provide a photo for you. I have to believe this would be an excellent way to ferret out some of these jewels and get them into the numismatic mainstream. If anyone has another suggestion along these lines, please, let's hear it! The important thing to keep in mind is that we have to reach non-numismatic people who are the owners of these pieces.

If you take advantage of my suggestion of an article and it is accepted by whatever non-numismatic publication you choose, we would ask that you share your success with the members and send a copy of the article with the details to "Critter" for reprinting in *BO TALES*.

The bottom line is, let's do everything possible, however we can, to get information about Hobo 5¢ out to the non-collecting public where I'm convinced that at least 90% of the original pieces still reside. ★



Mary Shaw (left) and Roger Wollam (right), Past President and national award winning newsletter editor of the Tampa Bay Coin Club compare notes on the best places to find Original Hobo Nickels.

New Book on Buffalo Nickels

We had a nice note from David W. Lange, author of *The Complete Guide to Buffalo Nickels*. David tells us that he "has a casual interest in hobo nickels" and that he "touches upon this subject in his book." Since we "may have an interest in the Buffalo Nickel series as a whole" he has kindly sent us information about this newly published manuscript. Anyone wanting information may write directly to the author: David W. Lange, P.O. Box 190476, San Francisco, CA 94119

His book sells for \$24.95 plus \$3.00 postage and handling for softcover, and \$44.95 plus \$3.00 P&H for hardcover. He will autograph your copy upon request.

We would love to have a review for the next issue of *BO-TALES*!



Bill Fivas (left) and Ed Fillpkowski (right) discuss the finer points of Hobo Nickel Collecting at the recent F.U.N. show.

Nickel Street: The Week in Review

by Louie the Rat

Have you seen the "Grey Sheet" for the past month to six weeks on the World War Two, Jefferson Nickel Market? Unbelievable! I haven't seen so many plus signs since I was in algebra class. Keep in mind this is the **BU roll market**. For the past month prices have also steadily risen on the "Teletrade" (trademark) auction market, not as dramatic as the roll market, but a steady rise. Granted, in my opinion, some of this is hype. I smell some promotion. But unlike the Full Bell Line Franklin Half promotions just a couple of years back, I think this market will hold.

This is the two hundred and fifty year anniversary of Thomas Jefferson's birth. There have been recent stories in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* as well as all the trade publications. The Jefferson Nickel market in general is strong across the board, singles, varieties and full steppers. Recommendation: Buy. I think the market will continue to grow until early to mid June then weaken somewhat through the mid and late summer. I expect the market to recover in early and mid Fall and continue to show strong collector interest and rising profits with prices holding **somewhat steady** after the major players sell off, take their profits and set out.

★ Important Dates ★

- July 10
9:00 AM** Meeting of the
"Original Hobo Nickel Society"
at the A.N.A. Headquarters in
Colorado Springs. All are invited.
- July 10-17** A.N.A. Summer Seminar in
Colorado Springs.
- July 29 to Aug. 1** A.N.A. Convention in
Baltimore, Maryland.



John Kleis, Dallas Shaw, Chuck "Buddha" Irwin, and Ed Filipkowski
examine Hobos during F.U.N.

Profiles

**This month's profile is on the Society's
President, Dallas A. Shaw, AKA "Colonel."**

Dallas was born and raised in rural north Florida. He received B.S. degrees from Cameron College and the University of Maryland and an M.A. degree from the University of Oklahoma. He entered the U.S. Army and began military life in the parachute infantry. He served many years in the 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions and is a rated senior parachutist. He is a decorated veteran of two years service with combat units in Vietnam, having been wounded in the Tet Offensive of 1968.

Dallas is married to fellow Army retiree Mary Shaw and is the son-in-law of noted numismatist John "Trapper" Kleis. He and Mary reside on a 2½ acre botanical delight in Palatka, Florida. Their collecting interests include coins, stamps, lion glass, honey dishes, old books and other antiques. ★

SEND LETTERS!



BO-TALES welcomes your comments
and opinions. Drop us a line and
we will print them in the next issue.

Treasurer's Report

INCOME:

Memberships	\$2,410.00
Donation	5.00
Total	\$2,415.00

EXPENSES:

A.N.A. Membership	\$30.00
F.U.N. Membership	10.00
Office Supplies	43.00
Total	\$83.00

CASH ON HAND \$2,332.00

Membership Report

Honorary Life Members	2
Life Members	8
Junior Members	4
Regular Members	54
Total Membership	68



From the Editor's Desk

THIS is an editor's dream. I have so much copy from so many other writers, wonderful stories, detailed information, that all I have to do is write an editorial. Not like our first issue, I assure you.

THIS is an editor's nightmare. There is so much copy from so many other writers I don't have enough space left to discuss everything we need to talk about. *Look for your supplemental letter to members.*

WHAT a wonderful response we have had to our opening membership drive. We now have over seventy members, from Maine to Hawaii, Alaska to Florida. We are a member club of the ANA and F.U.N. I have written many of you personally, answered many letters, and have had the privilege to talk with many of you on the telephone. I've done my best to answer your questions, give you my best advice and try to steer you in the right directions. I've missed a few along the way, especially during the blizzard of '93 and now that my farming season has begun. If I didn't answer your letter forthright, please be patient. If I've missed someone along the way, I'm sorry. Please let me know and I'll make it right.

I'M SO PROUD OF US. We have met our goals. This summer a young upcoming numismatist will attend the ANA Summer Conference in Colorado Springs, all expenses paid, because of what **WE'VE DONE.** This

year the ANA has graciously agreed to pay half of the tuition and transportation and the SOCIETY has paid the other half. Together, we do good work.



THE most commonly asked question I've received from Society members is: "Where can I purchase an original Bo or Bert carved nickel?" One member purchased TWO at the Bowers & Merena Auction held in conjunction with F.U.N. in January. Now there are **THREE going on the auction block.** Certified and authenticated.

I am a member of the **Interstate Coin Club**, Hagerstown, Maryland. During our annual Spring show held in March, I purchased five hobos from two local "old time" dealers. They purchased them from Del Romines in 1982. I paid fifty dollars each. I studied the nickels carefully. I asked my good friend and fellow Society member, Bill Fivaz to take a look at them for me; and if originals, to certify and authenticate them. They were, and he did. I spoke with Del Romines in an attempt to establish a pedigree and learned that this group contains some of the last nickels carved by George Washington "Bo" Hughs. I am donating three of the nickels (I'm keeping the reverse carved donkey for my personal collection) to the **YN Auction** held at the ANA Summer Conference July 10-16 at Colorado Springs. They will

be sold to the highest bidder. The proceeds of the sale will be donated half to the YN Scholarship fund of the ANA and half to our general fund — minus my original investment. Fair enough? In the last two YN auctions prices have ranged from \$250 to \$400 each. The money to the YN's will be given in the name of the SOCIETY.

WHAT does this mean to you? Here's your chance to own a BO. In mid-May, I will send to each member a letter giving a full description of each of the three nickels.

This is for Society members only. If you would like to bid on one of the hobo nickels, send a letter to the Society, P.O. Box 37, Boonsboro, MD 21713. **Be sure to mark the envelope "For YN Auction."** I will carry the mail to Colorado Springs in July and present the sealed bids to the President and Treasurer for them to open. The highest mail bid received will then compete with the floor bidders. Results will be published in the August edition.



HIGHLIGHTS FOR AUGUST: The final draft of the Society's Constitution has been finished. In the next few days officers of the Society will review the draft and have an opportunity to make comments. Copies of the document will be sent to all active members for comment and review.

Newell Shireman (continued from page 1)

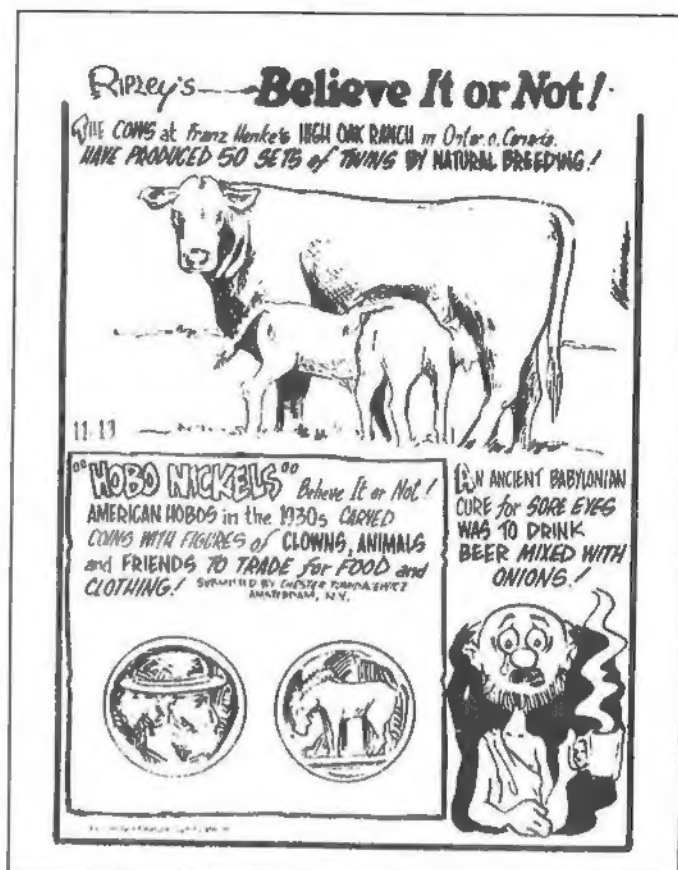
the years, he had traded than all away; one to a women in Bristol, Tennessee (in exchange for a meal); the last one was lost in a poker game.

Newell and Bert parted company in the early fall of 1933. As soon as the weather started to turn, Bert would head South to meet a friend for Christmas in New Orleans. Newell saw Bert four or five times after that. Once, about two months later near the Mexico border, and the last time around 1935 as they were both riding on the tops of freight trains. Newell was heading west on the Nickel Plate Rail Road — between Buffalo and Erie in New York and Bert was heading east on the same line. They recognized each other and waved as the trains passed. Newell never saw Bert again, but he never forgot his friend, or his nickels.

The reason Newell was at the coin show was to look for one of Bert's nickels. He said that he could recognize one, because Bert used to remove the "Li" and the "y" from the word "Liberty" on the front of the coin — which would leave "bert." He didn't find any at this show, or at any of the other shows that he goes to, but he did buy a couple of modern "rebo's."

After Newell and I talked, I asked him if he had ever read Del Romines book on hobo nickels. Since he said that he had not, I gave him my copy. Later, when I saw him, he told me how much he had enjoyed it. He didn't agree with all of the information, but said that most of it was accurate, as he remembered it.

Newell "Mess Cook" Shireman is a delightful man, and I very much enjoyed our visit. We can all learn from his hobo code: never take nothing for nothing — give 'em a nickel! ★



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The Original Hobo Nickel Society

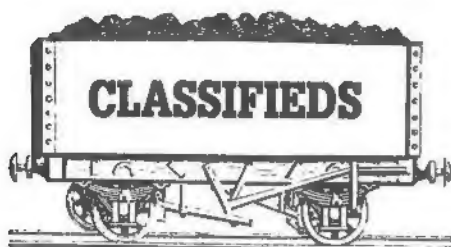
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Mail to: **The Original Hobo Nickel Society Inc.**
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[Editor Note: Ms. Allen's HOBOS are stamped on the reverse with her initials.]

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